

SECRET.

COPY NO. _____

C A B I N E T 47 (39).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held
at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on FRIDAY,
1st SEPTEMBER, 1939, at 11.30 a.m.

P R E S E N T.

The Rt. Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P.,
Prime Minister. (In the Chair).

The Right Hon.

Sir John Simon, G.C.S.I., G.C.V.O.,
O.B.E., K.C., M.P., Chancellor
of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon.

Lord Maugham,
Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon.

Viscount Halifax, K.G., G.C.S.I.,
G.C.I.E., Secretary of State for
Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon.

Sir Thomas Inskip, C.B.E., K.C.,
M.P., Secretary of State for
Dominion Affairs.

The Right Hon.

Malcolm MacDonald, M.P.,
Secretary of State for the
Colonies.

The Right Hon.

W.S. Morrison, M.C., K.C., M.P.,
Chancellor of the Duchy of
Lancaster.

The Right Hon.

L. Hore-Belisha, M.P.,
Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon.

John Colville, M.P., Secretary
of State for Scotland.

The Right Hon.

The Earl De La Warr, President
of the Board of Education.

The Right Hon.

Ernest Brown, M.C., M.P.,
Minister of Labour.

The Right Hon.

Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, M.P.,
Minister of Agriculture and
Fisheries.

Sir Edward Bridges, K.C.B., M.C.,Secretary. |

The Right Hon.

Viscount Runciman,
Lord President of the
Council.

The Right Hon.

Sir Samuel Hoare, Bt., G.C.S.I.,
G.B.E., C.M.G., M.P., Secretary
of State for Home Affairs.

The Right Hon.

Sir John Anderson, G.C.B.,
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., M.P.,
Lord Privy Seal.

The Most Hon.

The Marquess of Zetland, G.C.S.I.,
G.C.I.E., Secretary of State
for India and Burma.

Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon.

Lord Chatfield, G.C.B., O.M.,
K.C.M.G., C.V.O., Minister
for Co-ordination of Defence.

The Right Hon.

The Earl Stanhope, K.G.,
D.S.O., M.C., First Lord of
the Admiralty.

The Right Hon.

Sir Kingsley Wood, M.P.,
Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon.

Oliver Stanley, M.C., M.P.,
President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon.

Walter Elliot, M.C., M.P.,
Minister of Health.

The Right Hon.

E.L. Burgin, M.P.,
Minister of Supply.

Captain the Right Hon.

D. Euan Wallace, M.C., M.P.,
Minister of Transport.

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THE INTER-
NATIONAL
SITUATION.

Previous
Reference:
Cabinet 46 (39)
Conclusion 1)

1. THE PRIME MINISTER said that the Cabinet met under the gravest possible conditions. The event against which we had fought so long and so earnestly had come upon us. But our consciences were clear, and there should be no possible question now where our duty lay.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that the position was still confused in many respects, but the main lines were clear. In the last two days the principal obstacle to progress had been the difficulty of establishing contact between the Germans and the Poles. On the previous night a telegram had been sent to the Polish Government saying that we hoped that they would instruct their Ambassador in Berlin to see Herr von Ribbentrop. It was not quite clear what action had actually been taken, though it appeared that Herr von Ribbentrop had sent for M. Lipski.

All this, however, was rather ancient history. The Cabinet would now have seen the announcement of the German Government which had appeared in the Press that morning. Since then, reports had been received of the invasion of Poland. The Cabinet would also have seen a copy of Herr Hitler's proclamation, and also of Herr Forster's proclamation announcing the annexation of Danzig to the Reich.

The Polish Ambassador had called to see the Foreign Secretary that morning, and had said that he had had information that German troops had crossed the frontier at a number of places. There were also reports of the bombing of various Polish towns. He (the Polish Ambassador) had expressed the opinion

that circumstances had arisen which called for the implementation of our guarantee. He (the Foreign Secretary) had replied that, provided the facts were as stated, he did not suppose that we should differ from the Polish Ambassador's conclusion.

The Foreign Secretary said that he had then rung up the German Chargé d'Affaires and told him of the reports which had been received, namely, that the German troops had crossed the frontier, and of the bombing of Polish towns. He had asked the German Chargé d'Affaires whether he had any information to convey to the Foreign Secretary, or any message from the German Government. He had added that the situation appeared to be a very serious one; that the Cabinet would be meeting shortly; and that any further communication would be made by Sir Neville Henderson to the German Government, and the German Chargé d'Affaires informed.

The German Chargé d'Affaires had rung up a quarter of an hour ago saying that he had had a message from the News Department in Berlin that it was not true that Warsaw and other cities had been bombed. He had also referred to an observation in Herr Hitler's speech to the effect that there was shooting going on from the Polish side and that they (the Germans) were shooting back.

The Foreign Secretary also informed the Cabinet of a telephone message he had received from the American Ambassador in London to the effect that he had had a telegram in regard to the bombing of Warsaw, and indicating great satisfaction with our attitude.

Later in the meeting, various messages were read out, which appeared to indicate that the reports of the bombing of Warsaw, at any rate, were premature.

The Foreign Secretary also referred to two conversations which he had had with Count Ciano on the previous day, although these were now of perhaps historical interest only. The first message had been that Signor Mussolini was very anxious to help, but wanted some new fact on which to approach the Führer. He had asked whether the Poles were willing to say that they would agree to the return of Danzig to the Reich and to negotiate on other matters. After speaking to the Prime Minister, he (the Foreign Secretary) had replied that Danzig was the kernel of the matter, and that he did not feel that it would be possible to make any progress on the basis suggested. As he saw the matter, the real point was to get the German Government to agree to negotiations.

Count Ciano had then rung up a second time and had proposed that a general Conference should be held on the 4th September to discuss all questions arising out of the Treaty of Versailles which gave rise to difficulties. This matter had been discussed with the French Government, and it had been agreed that, while it would be impossible to accept the idea of negotiation under an open threat of force, it was undesirable to show any unwillingness to agree to negotiations under more favourable conditions. This suggestion had however then been overtaken by the course of events.

The Foreign Secretary also read out to his colleagues telegram No. 737 from Rome, in which Sir Percy Loraine recorded a statement made by Count Ciano, under the seal of secrecy, as to Italy's attitude.

In the course of discussion, it was pointed out that ~~that~~^{there} was at present no very definite information as to what hostile action had taken place in Poland and that it was desirable not to take any irrevocable action until we had some greater assurance on this point. It was pointed out that Herr Hitler was at present making a speech which was being broadcast and further particulars of this speech would be available before the end of the Cabinet meeting. A telegram had also been received from Sir Neville Henderson indicating that after Herr Hitler's speech in the Reichstag there might be some further peace effort on Herr Hitler's part.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that at a later stage in the proceedings it would be necessary to consider the terms of the communication to be sent to the German Government. He thought that it would be convenient if the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence could at this stage give the Cabinet the views of the Chiefs of Staff as to whether it was desirable that this communication should contain a time limit.

THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE said that he had discussed this matter very briefly before the meeting of the Cabinet with his Service colleagues, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chiefs of Staff. The process of evacuation of the civil population had just started, and, looking at the matter from that point of view, it was obviously desirable that there should be a further delay before we sent a communication in the nature of an ultimatum. Apart from this point, which was not of determining importance, the general view of the Chiefs of Staff was set out in a paper (C.O.S. 966 Revise) which they had prepared a few days

previously. Broadly, their view was that, once an ultimatum had been despatched, immediate action might be taken by the potential enemy. In principle, therefore, the period between the despatch and the expiry of the ultimatum, which was one of uncertainty, should be as short as possible.

The Foreign Office representative had thought that the period should be not less than 6 hours. In 1914 the period had been 4 hours. In the view of the Chiefs of Staff, from the air point of view, it was desirable, if an ultimatum with a time limit was despatched, that the ultimatum should expire at midnight, although from the Naval point of view this was not an ideal arrangement.

The Chiefs of Staff had also considered whether there was any particular advantage in delay before the issue of an ultimatum. Their general feeling had been that, if we reached the conclusion that circumstances had arisen in which we were bound to implement our guarantee, the right course would be that we should despatch to Germany a communication in the nature of an ultimatum without any undue delay.

At this point the Cabinet adjourned discussion of the nature of the communication to be sent to the German Government, and considered various Defence Measures (See Conclusion 2 below).

Later the Cabinet resumed discussion of the communication to be made to the German Government, Copies of a draft prepared were circulated to the Cabinet.

The question was asked whether the information which had been received as to hostile actions was sufficiently definite to justify the despatch of a communication on the lines of the draft. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs read extracts

from Herr Hitler's speech, which made it clear that on Herr Hitler's own statement Germany was now invading Poland.

The Foreign Secretary proposed the following alteration of the final sentence in the draft communication, which read:-

"His Majesty's Government accordingly notify the German Government that unless they can immediately satisfy His Majesty's Government that these reports are unfounded, or, in the alternative, are prepared to give His Majesty's Government satisfactory assurances that aggression against Poland has been stopped and that the German troops will be promptly withdrawn from Poland, His Majesty's Government will without hesitation fulfil their obligations to Poland."

This amendment met with general approval.

The Foreign Secretary added that he had received a communication from the French Government to the effect that they wished to declare war before we did. The reason given for this was said to be public opinion in France, since the French Government were anxious not to appear to be dragged into war by us.

It was agreed that while the French might reasonably claim that we should not declare war before they did, the right course would be that the French and ourselves should declare war at the same time.

Some discussion ensued whether the draft should be amended to state specifically that we had been invited by the Poles to fulfil our guarantee to them. The general feeling was that an amendment in this sense was unnecessary and would not be an improvement.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS then read to his colleagues a message which had been received by Sir Alexander Cadogan from Mr. D....., speaking from Berlin. The message was to the effect that he

supposed that we had heard that fighting had broken out, and that, according to the information in Berlin, this had resulted from the Poles having blown up a bridge. Herr Hitler had declared that he did not want to start a world war, and wanted direct negotiations with Great Britain.

Mr. D.... suggested that he should fly back at once from Berlin with Sir G. Ogilvie-Forbes as a last minute attempt to avert the catastrophe. Mr. D.... had said that we would ring up again at 1.15.

After discussion, it was agreed that the reply to be sent by telephone to Mr. D.... should be stiff, and should stress the fact that the only way in which a world war could be stopped would be if the German troops left Polish territory and hostilities were suspended. No hope should be held out that we should act as mediators between Germany and Poland.

The question whether a time limit should be inserted in the communication to Germany was again referred to.

THE PRIME MINISTER pointed out that it was possible that the Germans might take aggressive action on the receipt of this telegram. Although it was unlikely that they would start an air attack on this country, they might start an attack on our merchant shipping and ships of war.

It was pointed out that it was important to ascertain the French attitude in regard to this matter. The view generally held was that the insertion of a time limit gave a false sense of security, and should be omitted. The real question at issue was when the draft telegram should be despatched. On this we should act in consultation with the French Government.

The question was raised whether it was possible to avoid a formal declaration of war, in view of the United States of America's probable attitude under the Neutrality Act. It was agreed that this point should be borne in mind, but the view generally held was that a declaration of war was the right course.

THE PRIME MINISTER proposed, and the Cabinet agreed, that the communication as amended should be sent off as soon as agreement had been reached with the French. It was desirable that the despatch of the telegram should take place at about 5 p.m., in order that the fact that a communication had been despatched should be announced in Parliament.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS proposed, and it was agreed, that he should be authorised to inform the Dominions in regard to the despatch of this communication to the German Government.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that when the communication was sent to the German Government he thought our Ambassador should have instructions firstly to ask when he might expect to receive a reply, and secondly, if the reply was unfavourable, whether he should then ask for his passport. The view was expressed that our Ambassador should be instructed to ask for a reply, but that the question of the procedure to be adopted in this matter was one for discussion with the French Government.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were authorised to take such action as they thought fit in this matter,

The Cabinet agreed to the despatch of a draft communication^{*} as amended, to the German Government, after consultation with the French Government, and authorised the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to settle any outstanding points without further reference to the Cabinet.

DEFENCE
MEASURES.

2. THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE said that at a meeting of the Defence Preparedness Committee summoned very hurriedly that morning Departments had been authorised to put the Precautionary Stage into force, subject to one or two matters which had been reserved for decision by the Cabinet.

Mobilization
Measures.

Decisions taken that morning included the completion of the mobilization of the whole of the Army (including the Territorial Army) and the Royal Air Force by Proclamation and of the Royal Navy with the exception of the Royal Naval Special Reserve. These steps would be implemented and the necessary Orders in Council would be approved at a meeting of the Privy Council to be held that morning.

Warning
Telegram.
Reference to
Italy.

One of the main points to be settled was whether the warning telegram sent out on the institution of the Precautionary Stage should include Germany only, or Germany and Italy, as potential enemies. This matter was to some extent affected by the telegram from Sir Percy Lorraine which the Foreign Secretary had just read.

The Cabinet were informed that telegrams had been sent to all Commanders-in-Chief abroad as to the action which they should take in the event of the receipt of a warning telegram specifying both Germany and Italy as potential enemies. The view was expressed by the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary that it was desirable not to stop precautionary measures in the Mediterranean.

At the same time, it was felt that it would be desirable to avoid any action which would be regarded as unduly provocative to Italy. In particular, it would be undesirable to take drastic action in regard to people of Italian nationality in Colonies such as Malta, although it was appreciated that there might be particular instances of persons of Italian nationality employed in vulnerable points where some action might be required.

After discussion, the Cabinet agreed that the warning telegram should include both Germany and Italy as potential enemies, on the basis that while Germany was specified as an enemy without qualification, it should be explained that Italy's position was not yet publicly defined; that it seemed likely that her position would be one of neutrality and while it was necessary to guard against possible surprise attack, action should not be embarked on which would be regarded as unduly provocative, such as, for example, the internment of civilians, except in special cases.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS thought it would be necessary to inform the Dominion Governments of the gist of Sir Percy Loraine's telegram No. 737 from Rome. It was agreed that this should be done.

Defence of
the Suez Canal.

It was agreed that the second stage of the Suez Canal Defence Plan should be put into operation.

Institution
of Food Control.

After hearing a statement from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Cabinet authorised the Chancellor to take the following steps:-

- (i) To constitute and set up Food Control Committees.
- (ii) To take over the control of the distribution of staple commodities.
- (iii) To decentralise Smithfield and Billingsgate.
- (iv) To issue orders fixing maximum prices for a number of important commodities.

With regard to the last item, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster pointed out that the Provision Exchanges would probably pass a stand-still Resolution that afternoon, as they had done in the previous September if he invited them to do so. He proposed to invite them to act in this way.

Issue of Broad-
cast Message
and Control of
Radio
Transmission.

The importance was emphasised of keeping broad-casting going on the widest possible basis as long as possible. On the other hand, it was felt that it would be undesirable to run the risk of delaying synchronisation after we had made a communication to Germany in the nature of an ultimatum.

The Cabinet agreed to confirm the decision already taken by the Defence Preparedness Committee at their Second Meeting, by which the Secretary of State for Air had been authorised to order synchronisation when he considered that this was necessary, in consultation with the Lord Privy Seal.

Advanced Air
Striking Force.

It was agreed that steps should be taken to send the Advanced Air Striking Force to France forthwith.

The first
contingent
of the
Field Force.

It was agreed that arrangements should be made for the first contingent of the Field Force to proceed to France forthwith. No announcement should of course be made in regard to either of these measures.

Brief references were made to a number of other measures, such as the establishment of a Ministry of Economic Warfare, the institution of coal control and of food control and motor spirit rationing, which were ready to be put into operation immediately after the outbreak of war.

Evacuation.

THE PRIME MINISTER asked whether it was possible to expedite the process of evacuation.

THE LORD PRIVY SEAL explained that the evacuation scheme had been very carefully organised and that there was no alternative between adhering to the arrangements which had been made or allowing people to proceed in a wholly unorganised way.

The Cabinet took note of this statement.

Meeting of
Parliament
and Emergency
Bills.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that arrangements had been made for Parliament to meet at 6 p.m. that evening. He was proposing to arrange for the publication forthwith of the correspondence which had taken place with the German and Polish Governments. In particular, he wanted to bring out the point that while the Polish Government had been prepared to agree to our proposal for a military standstill, the German Government had made no answer on this point.

The Prime Minister said it was also proposed to ask Parliament to pass about seventeen Emergency Bills through all their stages that evening.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER explained that the procedure proposed was to table an Emergency Resolution, and, as a first step, to pass a Vote of Credit for £500 millions. This would be followed by the Consolidated Fund Bill.

The second part of the Emergency Resolution would be framed with a view to passing the other sixteen Emergency Bills which were regarded as of first priority, and which should be passed into law before the outbreak of hostilities.

The Chancellor pointed out that this list of Bills included the Compensation Bill.* He thought that it might possibly be found necessary to defer this Bill until the ensuing day.

* See note on next page.

The Cabinet agreed to the procedure proposed.

Bank Holiday
and Exchange
Control.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that the view now held was that it would be desirable that the Bank holiday, which it was planned to declare on the outbreak of war, should be on Monday, the 4th September. This decision was dependent upon the date on which the Exchange Control Regulations were made.

The Chancellor explained that no fresh legislative authority was required for either of these two measures.

The Cabinet authorised the Chancellor of the Exchequer to take the necessary action in regard to these two matters.

- # The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries may wish to raise at a later date the form of the tribunal to be established for assessing the value of agricultural land for compensation purposes.

ATTITUDE OF
DOMINIONS.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER said that he had had a communication from Mr. de Valera last night. The German Minister had told Mr. de Valera that if war broke out Germany was anxious to respect the neutrality of Eire. Mr. de Valera had replied that his policy was to maintain the neutrality of Eire but he had it was understood added that Eire would not, of course, tolerate any German activities, including propaganda, on Eire soil.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS said that it had been contemplated that we should ask Eire at the least to break off diplomatic relations with Germany, if we became involved in war. Mr. Dulanty had informed him that he thought that in a week Eire would come in on our side as a result of attacks on shipping.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that at the moment there was no action to be taken, but he thought the Cabinet should be aware of the position.

THE LORD CHANCELLOR said that he had had a talk with Mr. Mackenzie King when he was in Canada. Mr. Mackenzie King had asked him to tell the Cabinet, and, in particular, the Prime Minister that, owing to the attitude of certain of his colleagues, it was not possible for him to make any further announcement of Canada's attitude until war had broken out, but that Canada would be in it with us. He also said that he had had discussions with a large number of people in the United States, who all took the view that the United States would be in the war sooner or later, and that nobody could say how soon they would be in.

The Cabinet took note of this statement.

THE CABINET. 4. THE PRIME MINISTER said that he felt sure that it was in the minds of his colleagues that, if war came, it would be necessary to make some alterations in Cabinet arrangements. He had no doubt that the right course was to set up a War Cabinet at once on the model of the War Cabinet established in the last war, and this was the course he intended to follow.

The Prime Minister added that it might be necessary to make certain other alterations in the Cabinet. He asked whether he might assume that his colleagues were prepared to place their resignations collectively in his hands. The Prime Minister's colleagues intimated that they willingly agreed with the course proposed.

The Prime Minister then asked his colleagues to be good enough to inform their Under Secretaries that he would be glad if they also would be good enough to place their resignations at his disposal.

THE CABINET agreed to this course.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.

1st September, 1939.

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TO GERMANY

Telegram (en clair) to Sir N. Henderson (Berlin).

Foreign Office. 1st September 1939. 5.45 p.m.

No. 311. (BY TELEPHONE)

MOST IMMEDIATE.

Following is text referred to in my telegram No. 310.

On the instructions of His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, I have the honour to make the following communication.

Early this morning the German Chancellor issued a proclamation to the German Army which indicated clearly that he was about to attack Poland.

Information which has reached His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government indicates that German troops have crossed the Polish frontier and that attacks upon Polish towns are proceeding.

In these circumstances, it appears to the Governments of the United Kingdom and France that by their action the German Government have created conditions (viz: an aggressive act of force against Poland threatening the independence of Poland) which call for the implementation by the Governments of the United Kingdom and France of the undertaking to Poland to come to her assistance.

I am accordingly to inform Your Excellency that unless the German Government are prepared to give His Majesty's Government satisfactory assurances that the German Government has suspended all aggressive action against Poland and are prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from Polish territory, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom will without hesitation fulfil their obligations to Poland.

Repeated to Warsaw No.359, Rome 427, Washington No.462 (en clair).